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ABSTRACT

This document describes a series of activities to teach 30 fifth grade students about history through fiction. Activities began with a prereading brainstorming session in which students came up with topics that they studied during the school year. Next, the school librarian introduced the children to the genre of historical fiction and instructed them in locating books. Students selected works of historical fiction, then analyzed which aspects of the books were factual and which were fictional. At the end of the unit, the students prepared and presented oral reports on their findings. The lesson gave the teacher the opportunity to evaluate students' reading comprehension. At the same time, a group of 30 students was exposed to 30 works of historical fiction, as well as library location skills. (LBG)

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USING HISTORICAL FICTION TO TEACH UNITED STATES HISTORY: A Sample Lesson Plan

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Using Historical Fiction to teach United States History: A sample lesson plan

The Students:
This is a 5th-grade class of 30 students. It is the middle of May, almost the end of the school year. The class has been studying United States History throughout the school year. The average age of the students is 10 years, 9 months. The reading levels for the class extend from age 9 to age 12.

The Assignment:
The classroom teacher and the librarian have collaborated to introduce the students to the genre of historical fiction. The students will be selecting a historical fiction book on any topic in United States History. While the primary focus of the assignment is to use a trade book as a different source to teach history, the students will be encouraged to select a book of interest to them. After reading their book, the students will prepare a fact vs. fiction list of details from the book and will give an oral report.

Purpose and Rationale:
The purpose and rationale of this assignment is for students to discover they can learn about another time or place by reading a fiction book. Textbooks are not the only way to learn about life in the past. When reading for pleasure, the reader can learn about life in another era. The classroom teacher has the opportunity to evaluate the reading comprehension of the students. This assignment also offers the librarian the opportunity to introduce the genre of historical fiction and to review location skills.

Activity #1

The teacher will explain to the class that they will be selecting a book from the library to read and present an oral report. The book may be on any topic in United States History the class has been discussing. Before the class goes to the library, the teacher will lead the students in a pre-reading activity.

Pre-reading activity:
The class, led by the teacher, will brainstorm to produce a list of topics in United States History studied during the past year. As the students contribute their ideas, the teacher will write them on a large sheet of paper. (This sheet will be posted so all students can see it.) Throughout the brainstorming session, the teacher will encourage all students to contribute ideas. The list of topics will remain posted so the students may refer to the list while considering a topic to choose. The class will be going to the library approximately 3 hours after the brainstorming session.

Purpose and Rationale:
The purpose and rationale of this pre-reading activity is to activate the students' prior knowledge and provide a refresher of

topics discussed during the year. This activity will help the students focus on topics studied and give them guidance in selecting a topic.

Evaluation of Activity #1:
This activity will not be formally evaluated. The teacher will encourage all students to contribute to the list of topics. The teacher will take notice on topics that are more readily remembered by the students.

Activity #2

Activity #2 will take place the same day, approximately 3 hours after the first activity.

This activity will be led by the librarian. The librarian will be introducing the genre of historical fiction to the students. Also, in this activity, the students will be reviewing their location skills of using the catalog to locate a book.

Introduction of Historical Fiction Genre:
To introduce the genre of historical fiction to the students, the librarian will begin by reading a passage from the book The Friendship by Mildred D. Taylor (Dial, 1987). The passage read is the selection where Cassie reflects on the different ways Afro-Americans and Caucasian people are addressed. After reading the text, the librarian will lead the students in a discussion about the passage. The librarian will not use the term "historical fiction" until the discussion is completed. During this discussion, the students will discover the characteristics of historical fiction. Topics covered in the discussion will include: the characters do not represent real people, represent the average person during the 1930s in the south; the place and events represent and a real place and events that could have happened. The librarian also will read the Author's Note to the students and explain that this note can help decide if the book is historical fiction. If necessary, students are told, an encyclopedia can be consulted to determine if facts in question are true. After the discussion, the librarian will explain that books like this one that accurately portray details of a time or place but with fictitious characters, are called historical fiction.

Review of Location Skills:
After the discussion about historical fiction books, the librarian will instruct students to begin using the catalog to locate a book on their chosen topic. The librarian will rotate among the students to observe their location search. The librarian will work with individual students who may need help in refining subject headings to locate a book. After students have selected a book, they are told to read the summary of the book inside the front cover and to read the Author's Note to decide if the book is historical fiction. The librarian will review with the students, their chosen book to verify a historical fiction book has

been selected.

Purpose and Rationale:
One purpose of this activity is to teach students about the genre of historical fiction. Another purpose is to review the location skills to be sure all students can successfully use the catalog to locate books in the library. All students in the 5th grade should be able to use successfully the catalog to locate books before learning more complex library skills.

Evaluation of Activity #2:
There will not be a formal evaluation of this activity. The librarian will be able to evaluate each students' success by the amount of help needed to use the catalog and if students appropriately selected a historical fiction book on their own. After the students have selected a book to read, the teacher will explain the remainder of the assignment to them. After reading their book, each student should construct a list of details that are factual and a similar list of details that are fiction (Fact VS. Fiction list). Students will give an oral report on the book. The oral reports will include a summary of the story, the time and location of the story, the students' reasons for liking or disliking the book and pointing out the factual and fiction parts of the book. The students will have two weeks to read their books and to prepare their Fact VS. Fiction list and oral reports. The teacher must read each book to evaluate accurately the students' Fact VS. Fiction lists and oral reports.

Activity #3

This activity will be due exactly two weeks from the date the library
books were selected.

Fact VS. Fiction List:
Students will complete their Fact VS. Fiction list independently. After reading their selected book, students will construct two lists of details. The first list will be of factual or true details and the second list will be of fiction details.

Purpose and Rationale:
Listing factual and fiction items from the book will help the students discover what is fact or historically accurate and what is fiction or invented by the author. Students need to learn that some of what they read will be true and other information will not be true. Students must learn how to judge critically what they read for truth and facts. From this assignment, students also will learn that reading a historical fiction book is another way to learn about life in a faraway time or place. Learning about history does not come only from history textbooks, historical fiction books can teach students what it was like to live in another time or place.

Evaluation of Activity #3:
Students will hand in their written list Fact VS. Fiction. Since this is the first exposure to historical fiction for the students, the teacher will look for 70% accuracy in the students' lists. For students making below 70% accuracy, the teacher will review and discuss their list with them before their oral report is given. The lists will be evaluated on the teacher's knowledge of each title. If the teacher has not read all the books or only briefly summarized some titles, then the teacher and the librarian may review the lists together.

Activity #4

This activity will begin two days after Activity #3 was turned in. Four students each day will give their oral report. This activity will take eight days to complete.

The Oral Report:
The oral reports will include a summary of the story, the time and location of the story, telling the factual and fiction parts of the book and the students' reasons for liking or disliking the book.

Purpose and Rationale:
The oral reports will inform the teacher as to the students' understanding of the selected book and whether they can accurately separate fact from fiction. Other students in the class will be able to learn about the other books and perhaps motivated to read a book that interest them. Each student will read one book, but will be exposed to many other books through the oral reports.

Evaluation of Activity #4:
The oral reports will be evaluated on the completeness of the summary, accurate time and location and whether students have accurately itemized factual and fiction portions of the book. For this evaluation, the teacher must have read each book.

Evaluation of the Assignment:
This assignment is one by which the classroom teacher and librarian have collaborated to teach new topics and review skills. The classroom teacher has the opportunity to evaluate students' reading comprehension and help the students to learn to read critically separating fact from fiction. As an added benefit, students will read one book and be exposed to 29 others, that, from a different approach, teach about United States History. The librarian has the opportunity to introduce the genre historical fiction and to review location skills. Students at this level should be successful using the catalog to locate books in the library before progressing to complex skills. After completing these assignments, students should have beginning skills to read critically, separating fact from fiction, an understanding of historical fiction and a high rate of success using the catalog to locate library books.